Commandant’s Professional Reading List
- War Made New Discussion Guide –

This guide is intended to help Marines think about and synthesize ideas from the book War Made New. All answers or responses during discussion should be embraced as relevant, and open for further discussion. To the guide leader: There is no single right answer.

Encourage the Marine to read, from this book and other books. Encourage them to think and challenge and debate, and arrive at a common understanding. Encourage them to consider the ideas of others (authors and peers) and to push themselves intellectually.

Avoid leading the discussion group to a particular interpretation. Support continuous conversation. This guide does NOT support a lecture with mile-deep detail on every possible issue and scenario in the book War Made New.

The point of this guide is to help the readers synthesize the purpose, perspective, wisdom – “goodness” – of the book with their own perspectives on warfighting, and come out of this session or sessions of small group PME with a better sense of history, identity, and purpose.

**Prep Work:**

a. Be prepared to discuss the text with MCDP-1 (pp. 3-20) as a foundation for understanding the nature of war.

**Discussion Questions:** All answers/responses during discussion should be embraced as relevant, and open for further discussion.

1. As Max Boot discusses the nearly constant evolution in military technology and tactics that has occurred since the inception of warfare, what (if any) impact has this had on the nature of war?

2. Discuss how human factors can sway the outcome of a conflict – even more so than tactical and technological advances.

Key Take-Away: The nature of war itself has remained unchanged from what is discussed in MCDP-1. While military technology, gear, and equipment, along with TTPs have evolved over time – human factors, fog, friction, uncertainty, etc. still play a critical role in the nature of warfare. Boot gives several examples of how superior training, leadership doctrine and organizational structure, as well as sheer determination to fight have outweighed advances in technology.

3. Discuss the four major revolutions that Boot outlines and their major outcomes or consequences as Boot refers to them, and inter-relations

Key Take-Away: The manner in which wars have been fought has been in a constant state of evolution, and the four revolutions (Gunpowder, First and Second Industrial, and Information) are a great framework for understanding how it has evolved. None of these has taken place in isolation and each has enabled the success of the succeeding revolution. As an example, the gunpowder revolution all but eliminated naval boarding parties and increased the standoff distances between vessels at sea. The advances in naval artillery then forced ship builders to seek out lighter and more survivable materials during the industrial
revolutions, which in turn forced militaries to develop methods for defeating these new ships. From this, the aircraft carrier and dive-bombing would be developed. The aircraft carrier would prove to be one of the most influential pieces of military hardware ever developed.

4. What do you believe will be the next revolution and what will its major outcomes be?

5. What led to the rise of the United States as the pre-eminent military power? Looking into the future of conflict, how will the U.S. need to evolve in order to retain its position atop the world’s military powers?

Key Take-Away: Throughout history, military evolution has been an almost constant cat and mouse game. One nation will develop a particular technology, and then its competitors will develop technologies to defeat it. Focus on what the new technologies are in the current operating environment (i.e. MRAPs, F35, MV22, seabasing, and EF-21) and what you believe America’s competitors (near peer as well as non-state actors) are doing to defeat them. Will the next revolution be one based on unmanned technologies and cyber warfare or one based on irregular warfare? The U.S. was able to rise to power due to its financial affluence (protection from many of its adversaries). While some countries may have had technologically superior gear and equipment, the U.S. gained the advantage as it was able to produce gear and equipment at a much faster rate and without a significant threat of an attack to its CONUS industrial base. The bottom line is that the U.S. had translated its industrial strength into military superiority and no other nation was able to keep pace after the first industrial revolution.

6. What similarities can be seen in the English defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the fighting that the U.S. has seen in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Key Take-Away: Discuss the position of the Spanish Navy and the U.S. military in their respective time periods. Both were at the top of the world pecking order, however, both suffered significant blows at the hands of a much smaller and seemingly inferior enemy. In the case of the Spanish, their time honored TTPs were countered by English ingenuity – knowing that the Spanish would need to board their ships in order to defeat them, the Royal navy developed artillery that could be easily moved about the deck of the ship which would keep the Spanish armada at a distance were boarding was not possible.

7. There have been several references throughout history to revolutionary tactics and technologies that would virtually eliminate the need for ground combat forces – i.e. the Combined Bomber Offensive, and advanced UAS technology – is there anything that can ever eliminate the requirement for a thinking human combatant on the ground?

Key Take-Away: This will require a reference back to MCDP-1 and the nature of war. If the nature of war is truly unchanging, then the question may become, can technology perform better than humans in the fog and friction of war? Can a machine make more logical and deliberate decision in an uncertain environment that a Marine or a Soldier? Can a machine weigh the intangible benefits of certain decisions and see the second and third order consequences?

8. Taking into account the time and global security environment in which it was introduced, is the aircraft carrier the most significant development in military technology?

Key Take-Away: This will warrant a discussion of globalization (specific to the economy) and control of the seas. Prior to the aircraft carrier, advance air bases needed to be secured by ground forces, which limited the areas that an air force could operate. The aircraft carrier brought these barriers down and enabled the nations that possessed them to park a significant military threat off of an adversaries coastline as well as gain control of vital sea lines of communication.
9. While Boot briefly touches on it here, describe the supporting establishment and combat support that would be required as these revolutions in military affairs take place (i.e. the introduction of armored vehicles created a significant logistical challenge).

Key Take-Away: An evolution in military technology requires much more than just the piece of gear/equipment itself - there is an entire support network that must be in place prior to final operational capability. A fantastic piece of gear with no maintenance production system in place is only good until it breaks down for the first time.

10. Describe the advent of the military General Staff structure, what it meant at the time, and how its influence remains in tact today.

Key Take-Away: Students here should discuss how the general staff concept, developed by the Germans has led to greater efficiencies in military operations. Specifically on the planning side of the house, having a formalized general staff in place allows for more detailed and focused planning. A good discussion will also include some time spent looking at what the Marine Corps would be like (functionally) without a general staff today – what difficulties would we face in the planning and execution of even the simplest of operations.

11. Discuss the relationship between civilian industry and the military – how have civilian inventions, such as air conditioning, refrigeration, and the internal combustion engine and Ford’s electric-powered assembly line propelled the military revolution throughout history?

Key Take-Away: Throughout history, the military has drawn on the civilian sector for innovative ideas and concepts, and it has paid significant dividends. If the U.S. military is to continue to evolve, it must not do so under the belief that it has all of the answers internally – it must be open to civilian “best practices” and constantly looking for ways to incorporate them into daily operations. As an example, during WWII, the Ford Company “produced more army equipment … than Italy.” (p. 238)

*War Made New* Discussion Key Take-Aways:

1. While the conduct of war evolves, its nature remains unchanging
2. Evolution of military technology is continuous and stagnation at the top will lead to defeat in the future
3. Human factors often play a more prominent role in warfare than many technological advances
4. The civilian industrial sector must not be ignored in the quest for military innovation

To the Discussion Leader:

This guide does NOT support a lecture with mile-deep detail on every possible issue and scenario in the book *Gates of Fire.*